

MUSEUM THEATRE

KentuckyHistoricalSociety

Diary of the Depression

A Day With Mary Ruth Dawson



KentuckyHistoricalSociety

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Diary of the Depression

A Day With Mary Ruth Dawson

A diary kept by Mary Ruth Slaton of Hopkins County, Kentucky, inspired the character of Mary Ruth Dawson.

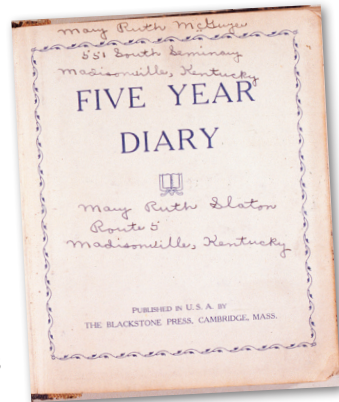
Born in 1905, Mary Ruth McGuyer married Rex Slaton in 1933. Their life on a dark-fire tobacco farm was typical of the period. Rex was responsible for the tobacco crop, while Mary Ruth kept a kitchen garden and a flock of chickens. Like many farms, the Slaton farm straddled past and present. Self-sufficient in some respects, the family took advantage of new technologies and trends when possible. Like many rural Kentuckians, the Slatons survived the Depression with more ease than some urban counterparts because they raised much of their own food and relied less on store-bought goods.

The character Mary Ruth is a typical farmwoman of the times. She is accomplished at gardening, cooking, and other chores. At the same time, she takes pride in being a modern woman. She keeps up with current events and has voted twice for Roosevelt. Although she does not dislike her life on the farm, she escapes her daily routine by reading and writing stories.

This performance is structured as a series of short discourses about aspects of her life. At the conclusion of the 12-minute long performance, the audience is invited to ask questions.

To learn more about Depression-era Kentucky, see the following:

- Blakey, George. *Hard Times and the New Deal in Kentucky, 1929-1939*. Lexington, 1986.
- Klotter, James C. *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900-1950*. Frankfort, 1996.
- The diary of Mary Ruth Slaton. Kentucky Historical Society. Available in Special Collections.



Playwright – Nancy Niles Sexton

Nancy founded Walden Theatre in 1976 with the dream of creating a theater conservatory to engage young people in theater through a formal curriculum and high level of performance. In 1994, she was selected to head KET's Playwrighting Project, and part of KET Shakespeare Task Force. Nancy holds a B.A. in English/Drama from the University of Kentucky and has done graduate study at The Yale Drama School.



Director – Greg Hardison

Since 1999, KHS Museum Theatre Coordinator, Greg Hardison, has acted, researched, written, directed and produced original plays covering almost every period of Kentucky History. He has received awards for his work in Florida, Virginia, and Kentucky, and currently serves on the board for the International Museum Theatre Alliance.

Mary Ruth Dawson - Patti Heying

Patti has been performing and teaching theatre for over twenty years, primarily in Kentucky and Minnesota. Patti recently completed her MFA in Performance at the University of Louisville and now works freelance as a director, performer, teacher and voice/dialect coach.

KHS Museum Theatre

Since 1998, the Museum Theatre program has staged more than forty original productions, often inspired by the rich resources in the Kentucky Historical Society collection. Each play is presented within KHS exhibition spaces and is designed to connect audiences with the sights, sounds, and stories of the past. These professional productions provide museum visitors with a personal perspective of historical characters and encourage them to explore the exhibitions to learn more. Audience members often find they relate to the story itself. *What's your story?*

This program was funded in part by a grant from the Kentucky Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Costume construction: Wilma Hedden-Wilma's Linens and Lace

Photo credits: (cover) 1929 Watson family farm (inside, left) 1929 inside cover of Mary Ruth Slaton's diary, call number: 98M07 (inside right) Log barn typically used to cure "dark-fired" tobacco.

Special thanks: KHS Special Collections, Robert Slaton and family, Truman Bartleson, Aunt Nina Gwinn, Elizabeth Peavler, (Prop) Chair - Grandmother Rankin, (Prop) Linens - Grandmother Welch